

COMMUNICATIONS

THE WORK OF THE WILSON CLUB

The question is frequently asked of me by our new members to define, in my capacity as Secretary, just what is the definite work and aim of the Club. As the recipient of a considerable volume of correspondence from our membership, perhaps I may be pardoned for this communication and the ideas set forth.

Among our membership are all sorts and kinds of students of bird life, ranging from those who are interested in the so-called "popular" side of bird study to those who have attained distinction in technical and taxonomic work. Assuming that the major trend of our work should conform to the interests of that large and substantial body of members who have supported the Club through the "lean years" of its existence, it would seem that our ideal work is the detailed, serious and accurate study of our native birds. True as it is that many volumes have been written on the subject and that the several ornithological magazines have published thousands of pages of valuable contributions on the habits of birds, yet none but the misinformed would say that the subject had been exhausted. The formulating of an accurate local list should be the backbone of the work of every observer and this task will require constant revisions and additions as years go by. The annotations to such a list represent the cream of the ornithologist's work and should contain only accurate and substantiated facts as to the breeding or other occurrence of the species at all seasons. Such a list should not be rushed into print for obvious reasons. Supplementing this work it has well been recommended that the observer should specialize on some particular phase of bird study. This may be migration, nesting habits, distribution, bird banding, research, economic investigation or detailed studies of the life histories of certain species. Almost without exception we are hampered by lack of time in our pursuit of bird study. With most of us only recreation hours from our bread and butter struggle are available. For this reason it is well to specialize in order that whatever phase of bird study we undertake may be well done. Most commendable indeed is the observer who balks at no hardships in his efforts to secure accurate and complete information and who possesses the energy and ability to put the result of his work into print where it will be readily available for the use of others. I have known of men who have spent the better part of a lifetime afield and who have built up wonderfully complete ornithological collections, including much rare material; yet these men are practically unheard of. They contributed but little to our fund of information on bird life either because they kept no sys-

tematic notes or because of their procrastination about putting them into printer's ink. The writer does not deery the formation of collections of birds, nests and eggs, but rather advocates them as a means of acquiring knowledge and substantiating ornithological information. (The cats in one suburban block will destroy more song birds in a season than most ornithologists would care to collect in a lifetime.) If, however, one finds that in making such a collection he is merely prompted by a desire for accumulation, or if it is robbing him of time needed for the keeping of systematic notes and for their preparation for publication, then he had best desist in his collecting.

Finally, I would call attention to the work of the U. S. Biological Survey at Washington and the desirability of our coöperating with this Bureau. Migration notes are solicited by the organization and blanks are cheerfully furnished for the purpose. Volunteers are needed in every section for making bird counts and to assist with bird banding. Local lists are also desired and are needed for those whose duty it is to prepare distributional papers. Preliminary local lists, not yet sufficiently complete to offer for publication, should be put in the hands of the Biological Survey and revised from time to time. There are many other ways in which active field workers can render valuable service to The Survey and in turn secure from it much desirable assistance.

I trust that in this rather rambling communication I have clearly given my ideas of the answer to the question mentioned in the first paragraph and that our new members at least will find in it some suggestion for properly directing their activities in the absorbing study of ornithology.

ALBERT F. GANIER.
Secretary W. O. C.

Nashville, Tenn., May 25, 1921.